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ABSTRACT

Occupational burnout was studied in two samples including 1,191 public school teachers and 190 principals and vice principals. The following factors were examined for their ability to predict burnout: overall job stress, job satisfaction, job challenge, and role clarity. Burnout was measured using the intensity dimension of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). Qualitative data were also obtained from three open-ended questionnaire items. Factor analysis confirmed the three dimensions of burnout found by Maslach: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Teacher or administrator characteristics of sex, years of experience, years in current position, assignment consistency with training, and grade level were not significant predictors of any of the three burnout dimensions. The results of a regression analysis indicated the following predictors in the samples of teachers. Emotional exhaustion burnout was best predicted by overall job stress, followed by satisfaction with status and recognition, satisfaction with work load, and job challenge. Depersonalization burnout and lack of personal accomplishment burnout were predicted by satisfaction with status and job challenge. For administrators, emotional exhaustion burnout and depersonalization burnout were predicted by overall job stress and satisfaction with status and recognition. Personal accomplishment burnout was predicted by satisfaction with status and recognition. (GDC)

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Overall Stress and Job Satisfaction as Predictors of Burnout

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Overall Stress and Job Satisfaction as Predictors of Burnout

Abstract

In this study burnout was conceptualized as a consequence of prolonged stress in individuals. To study this phenomenon, the researcher examined the degree to which burnout can be predicted by overall job stress, job satisfaction factors, job challenge, and role clarity. The Maslach MBI instrument was used to measure the degree of burnout among a sample of teachers and administrators in two large public school districts. Reliable measures were obtained on all of the selected predictor variables. The two independent samples consisted of 563 teachers and 62 administrators (principals and vice principals) in one school district, and 628 teachers and 128 administrators in the other. Qualitative data were also obtained by providing three open-ended questions on respondents' perceptions of experiences that contribute to burnout.

The major finding of the study was that overall stress was the most significant predictor of emotional exhaustion burnout. However, depersonalization and personal accomplishment burnout were best predicted by satisfaction with status and recognition and by job challenge. Thus if the three dimensional conception of burnout is the proper description of burnout, overall job stress may be the major source of only one of the burnout dimensions.

Overall Stress and Job Satisfaction as Predictors of Burnout

Stress is experienced by everyone in the continuous responses to pressures or stressors in the environment. The most common definition of stress is that it is a nonspecific response by the organism to demands made upon it. A stressor is viewed as the stimulus that makes demands on an organism thus inducing stress, and a response to stress. Whenever forces in a situation affect an individual physically or psychologically, the individual experiences stress. Mechanic (1978, p. 7) describes stress as "discomforting responses of persons to particular situations."

Stress defined in this way by itself does not create maladjustment, abnormal behavior or serious behavior problems. People react to stress in wide variety of ways, most of which lead to positive constructive behavior changes. However, many psychologists have linked stress to anxiety, tension, maladjustment, and physical disorders. This linkage even though it may be correct for some individuals may not be the proper explanation for stress resolution by the majority of people.

Because stress is a nonspecific response it is difficult to measure and study with any degree of precision. Further, it is difficult to compare stress as experienced by one individual to that experienced by another.

The popular life-events scale developed by Holmes and Rahe (1967) has been used widely to predict potential illness and maladjustment. However, some psychologists question its validity in predicting illness; see, for example, Cohen (1980). Schroeder and Costa (1984) found that the relationship between stress and illness is dependent on a number of variables and on the measurement of stress. They conclude by urging that alternate approaches to the conceptualization and measurement of stress be developed. The transactional models such as those suggested by Cox (1975), Lazarus and Folkman (1984), Ivancevich and Matteson (1980) and Kyriacou (1981) are among those used following the

General Adaptation Syndrome, The Social Readjustment Rating Scale, The Type A and Type B Typology, and stressor identification approaches.

However, even in the transactional models the two types of responses are not always clearly separated. The proposition is being advanced that the general nonspecific response to a stressor (stress) needs to be separated from the more specific and measurable response to stress.

Kyriacou (1981, p. 55) points to this when he states that "behaviour intended to reduce the experience of stress" is defined as coping behaviour. Lazarus (1966, p. 151) already referred to coping as "strategies for dealing with threat." Later he (1974) illustrated that the two ways of coping with stress were "direct-action processes," and "palliative activities." Lazarus also contends that (1966, p. 152) coping behaviors "depend on cognitive activity," which makes the stress cycle much more complex than that of animals where the perception of threat tends to lead to an automatic response to respond to it as in the fight or flight syndrome.

In an attempt to move the research from this very generalized and inclusive definition of stress, researchers have begun to separate the elements in the transactional experience of the stress cycle. In this approach various elements of the stress experience are separately defined in order to make somewhat more accurate measurements possible. See, for example, Lazarus (1974), Hiebert (1984), Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978), and Magnusson (1982).

The stressor, any stimulus that makes demands on an individual, is the first element of the stress cycle. Stressors have been studied extensively by psychologists and social psychologists. Many researchers have tried to identify the significant stressors in the work environment of organizational life. Terms that have been used are stressors (Selye, 1956), life events (Holmes and Rahe, 1967), hassles (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), threats (Meichenbaum, et al., 1975), and challenges (Stensrud and Stensrud, 1983). In each case these stressors are viewed as demands made on an individual, demands that exceed the

resources thus creating a disequilibrium. Viewed in this way it becomes evident that the perception of the stressor by the individual is an important component of the magnitude of the stress experienced.

The second component of the stress cycle can be termed resources. If the resources an individual possesses appear to that individual to be inadequate to meet the demands on the individual an imbalance occurs. Further if the consequences of failure to meet the demands is seen as serious the imbalance increases.

At this point that "nonspecific response" of stress sets in. The discrepancy between perceived demands and perceived resources and the perceived degree of seriousness in the failure to live up to the demands will determine the degree of stress experienced by an individual. It should be noted that as was the case for demands, the individual's perception of available resources and consequences of failure will play a major role in determining the level of stress experienced.

Even in most current research the concept of stress is still inadequately defined. Lazarus (1966) was one of the first to make the distinction between challenging and threatening stressors. Positive stress (eustress) is linked to situations that provide challenge to an individual, whereas negative stress (or distress) is associated with threatening experiences. The question will be raised as to whether the distinction between challenging and threatening stress lies in the stressors or in the individual under stress. Lazarus (1966) indicates that an event is stressful to the degree to which it is perceived as threatening, harmful, or challenging.

Arousal is the first and key stress response. The autonomic nervous system sets in motion a number of physiological changes. These have been well documented by Selye (1956) and others. However, many psychologists planned their studies using the general adaptation syndrome (Selye: 1956, 1976) and concentrated on short-term alarm, resistance and exhaustion experiences. (Gottschalk, 1983). Two problems are seen in this approach.

The first is that stress, especially in organizational life, is not necessarily of short duration. Second, that "people in the resistance stage often are irritable, impatient and angry. They experience constant fatigue," seems to exclude the majority of people who do cope well with their stressful experiences.

The third component in the stress cycle is the response made by the individual who experiences stress. Contrary to most of the studies the response is viewed as a cognitive and behavioral adapation to stress. It should be noted that Selye defined stress as a response to a stressor. Thus, the second-level response in the transactional model is viewed as a response to stress.

With the adaptive response behavior syndrome where a person takes direct action, equilibrium tends to be restored after action is taken. The stress cycle is thus not necessarily destructive, in fact it can be quite constructive, leading to better performance and greater satisfaction. The stress has been transformed into a challenge which rather than being dysfunctional is functional in leading to more effective coping.

With the maladaptive response pattern, however, stress tends to lead to defence mechanisms generally seen as disruptive or destructive to an individual. Freud already referred to the defences people erect to protect themselves from threatening environmental pressures. Mechanic (1978) lists the nine defence mechanisms people employ when under stress: regression, repression, reaction formation, isolation, undoing, projection, introjection, turning against the self, and reversal. These mechanisms operate at an unconscious level and involve denial, falsification, and distortion of reality. Because psychoanalytic methods tended to deal with neurotic behaviors, they lost some credibility when dealing with normal reactions to stress. In the present model they may be appropriate to explain the behavior of those who cope inadequately with stress. Mullen and Suls (1982) claim that defence-oriented coping mechanisms can be even more helpful than task-oriented ones. However, most psychologists recommend task-oriented responses to stress.

Another type of response to stress has been termed palliative. Palliative coping activities are aimed at changing the individual's appraisal of stress associated with demands and situations. Palliative responses are not designed as much to deal with a specific problem than with the symptom. Examples are physical exercise, meditation, encounter groups, biofeedback and behavior modification.

The final component of the stress cycle is the possible consequence of a maladaptive response to stress. One conceptualization of this response, as proposed by Maslach and Jackson (1981) in their studies, is termed burnout. According to this approach, burnout is viewed as a consequence of unresolved stress and is manifested in three possible forms: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, or Personal Accomplishment.

The conceptual model of the stress cycle can be viewed as presented in Figure 1.

Several important observations can be made about further research on occupational stress and the practice of managing stress in organizations. A few are noted below:

Stressors do not necessarily cause stress. It is the perception about the imbalance between demands and resources, and the perceived seriousness of the consequences of failure that cause the stress response.

Stressors are always present among people. At different stages of life different stressors become important for people.

The perception of the demands made on an individual by a stressor is an important aspect of what happens in the stress cycle.

The perception of an individual's coping abilities (resources) is another key element in the stress cycle.

The cognitive and behavioral responses that an individual makes in response to stress is a major element determining the effect stress will have on the individual.

For those individuals who do not cope well with stress, burnout becomes a real possibility. Burnout may take several forms depending on the perceptions of demands,

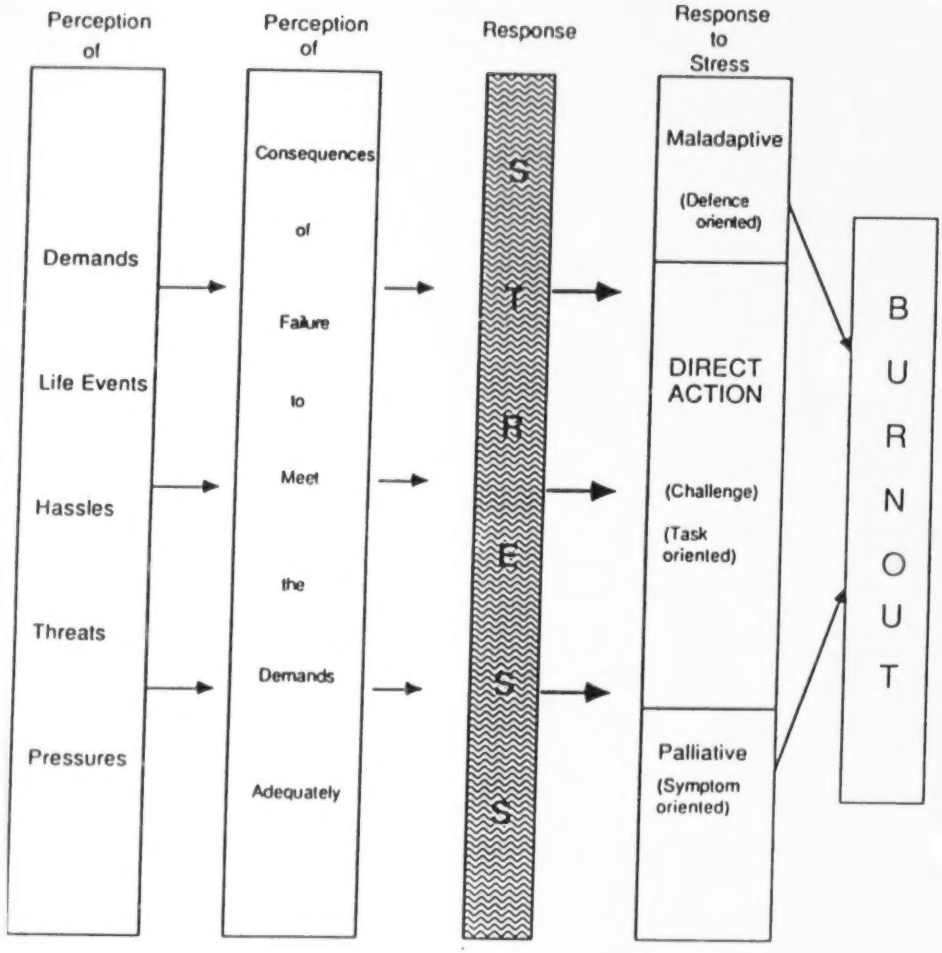

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of the Transactional Stress Cycle

resources and consequences of failure. Cognitive and behavioral responses are significant determiners of what happens.

Finally, it is the individual who creates stress and has to deal with it. Veninga and Spradley (1981.31) state that "high stress perceivers will . . . burn out more easily. " As a consequence coping skills (or life skills) appear to lie at the heart of a stress management program.

Purpose of the Study

The main objective of the study reported in this paper was to obtain the most significant predictors of each of the three dimensions of burnout identified by Maslach. The predictors were those suggested by research and theory as contributing to burnout among educators.

Methodology

The study reported here sought to establish the best predictors of burnout among school teachers and administrators. Two independent school districts were selected each with close to 1300 teachers. The questionnaire went to all of these teachers and the response rate was about 55% for both samples. The questionnaire was composed of the intensity dimension of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Appendix A), a number of background variables, a measure of overall job stress, a twenty-six item satisfaction scale, and an overall job satisfaction scale. Regression analysis was employed to test for predictors of the three burnout dimensions. For this analysis the twenty-six time satisfaction scale was subjected to varimax factor analysis which yielded seven satisfaction factors. (Appendix B).

Table 1 illustrates the consistency with which the Maslach Inventory factored into the three distinct dimensions, using a varimax factor solution. The solutions for three independent samples match very closely the solution obtained by Maslach.

The background variables of sex, years of experience, years in current position,

Table 1

Varimax Factor Loadings of the Maslach Burnout Inventory for Three Samples (•100)

	Maslach Samples	Samples of School Districts A (N=604)	B (N=2829)	C (N=753)
Emotional Exhaustion				
1.	70	82	83	81
2.	70	82	84	80
3.	60	74	70	76
6.	60	59	48•	60
8.	81	85	77	84
13.	65	68	70	68
14.	55	67	68	65
16.	47	51	35•	51
20.	60	67	54	64
Depersonalization				
5.	62	69	67	62
10.	74	76	77	76
11.	61	73	74	74
15.	52	70	73	68
22	40	46	52	56
Personal Accomplishment				
4.	50	54	53	54
7.	58	69	65	66
9.	63	67	68	74
12.	44	46•	65	48•
17.	55	69	73	66
18.	52	67	70	63
18.	56	75	74	75
21.	52	58	60	55

• Indicates double loadings

assignment being consistent with training, and grade level at which the individual is working were not significant predictors of any of the three burnout dimensions. Consequently, they were dropped from further analysis. These findings are in agreement with our earlier findings (Ratsoy and Friesen, 1985), and with those reported by Folkman (1982).

Table 2 contains the results of the regression analysis for the two independent teacher samples. It is noteworthy that the major predictors for each of the three burnout dimensions were almost the same for the two samples.

The major findings can be summarized briefly as follows:

Emotional Exhaustion Burnout was predicted best by overall job stress, followed by satisfaction with status and recognition, satisfaction with work load, and job challenge.

Depersonalization Burnout was predicted best by satisfaction with status and recognition and job challenge.

Similarly, Lack of Personal Accomplishment Burnout was best predicted by satisfaction with status and recognition and job challenge.

Table 3 contains the results of the regression analysis for principals and assistant principals in the two samples. Again the findings of the two independent studies were quite similar.

Emotional Exhaustion Burnout of principals was predicted best by overall job stress and their satisfaction with status and recognition.

Depersonalization Burnout was predicted best by satisfaction with status and recognition and with overall job stress.

Personal Accomplishment Burnout was predicted most strongly by satisfaction with status and recognition.

Discussion

The conceptual framework discussed earlier receives only partial support from the findings of the two studies reported in this paper. Burnout was conceptualized as a

Table 2

Summary of Regression Analysis with the Three Burnout Dimensions as Criterion Variables

Teachers Only

Criterion Variables	Predictors for School District A (N=563)	Predictors for School District B (N=628)
Emotional Exhaustion	Overall job stress Satisfaction with status and recognition Satisfaction with work load Job challenge	Overall job stress Satisfaction with status and recognition Satisfaction with work load Satisfaction with salary and benefits Job challenge
Depersonalization	Satisfaction with status and recognition Job challenge	Satisfaction with status and recognition Job challenge Overall job stress Satisfaction with work load
Personal Accomplishment	Satisfaction with status and recognition Job challenge Satisfaction with relationships	Satisfaction with status and recognition Job challenge Satisfaction with salary and benefits Satisfaction with advancements Satisfaction with security and involvement

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Table 3

Summary of Regression Analysis with the Three Burnout Dimensions as Criterion Variables

Principals and Assistant Principals

Criterion Variables	Predictors for School District A (N=62)	Predictors for School District B (N=128)
Emotional Exhaustion	Overall job stress Satisfaction with status and recognition Satisfaction with security and involvement	Overall job stress Satisfaction with status and recognition
Depersonalization	Satisfaction with status and recognition Overall job stress	Satisfaction with status and recognition Overall job stress Satisfaction with work load
Personal Accomplishment	Satisfaction with status and recognition	Satisfaction with relationships Satisfaction with status and recognition Satisfaction with advancements

consequence of unresolved stress among individuals. The findings indicate that overall job stress is the best predictor of Emotional Exhaustion but not of the other two dimensions of burnout. Consequently, questions may be raised about the appropriateness of the model presented, and also about the etiology of Depersonalization and Personal Accomplishment Burnout.

Overall job stress did not turn out to be a significant predictor of Personal Accomplishment Burnout for teachers or administrators in both samples. Hence it seems justified to propose that the etiology of this type of burnout does not relate directly to job stress. On the other hand it was predicted by the job satisfaction variable status and recognition, and by job challenge.

In fact, it is apparent that job satisfaction of one sort or another is a primary predictor of all three dimensions of burnout. Overall job stress appears to be a consistent predictor of only Emotional Exhaustion.

For teachers the job challenge factor is also a consistent and significant predictor of all three dimensions of burnout. Job challenge may represent the direct action coping strategy as shown in the transactional model of the stress cycle. Rather than viewing stressors as stress the majority of individuals convert the stress into a challenge. What makes this finding more interesting is that job challenge never appeared as a predictor of burnout among administrators.

Satisfaction with status and recognition is the most significant predictor of two dimensions of burnout and the second most significant predictor of Emotional Exhaustion. This finding is particularly important because it relates a specific form of job satisfaction to burnout. Is burnout perhaps more closely related to job satisfaction than to job stress?

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